

Camden: Rebirth of the IAS Service

SEND IAS Service Camden offers a comprehensive range of impartial IAS to parent/carers and CYP. It has established good working relationships with SENCoS and other professionals, both in and out of the borough, through its work supporting parents in meetings and regular attendance at SENCo Forums. These relationships, in part, are facilitated by Camden Learning, which SENDIAS Service Camden is now part of. It works closely with other local organisations such as the Special Parent's Forum and a Women's Centre giving presentations and attending parent group meetings. SENDIAS Service Camden acknowledges that its work with CYP is not as established as previously anticipated; however, this work is one of its main goals for the future.

The challenge

IAS Service Camden has recently undergone a prolonged service review, which resulted in SENDIASS being commissioned to Camden Learning. (Camden Learning is a joint enterprise set up between Camden schools and Camden Council).

During the timeframe of the review, the service suffered a reduction in staffing. In 2016, there were 4 full time members of staff, which included, the Service Manager, Service Co-ordinator, a newly appointed IAS Service Officer, and a Young Person's Development Officer, (YPDO). The SEND grant-funded 18-month contract for the YPDO was not extended. The longstanding manager retired at the end of 2016, leaving only 2 full-time members of staff continuing to provide support to families whilst also ensuring the service strategic functions were fulfilled. All outreach work, parent training and support groups had to be postponed during this period due to lack of capacity. Despite capacity issues, service user contacts continued to rise and complexities of casework increased. The service maintained a high standard of support to its families with minimal changes to working practices during this very challenging period.

The Camden IAS Service is fortunate in having a very supportive Steering Group, led by an independent Chair with personal family experiences of SEND. Throughout the review period, the Chair was very proactive, meeting with the LA, Camden parents and Councillors, and his support and that of the Steering Group was invaluable to the service and individual members of staff.

Towards the end of 2017 the IAS Officer left to become the IAS Service manager of another London service provider, meaning further demands on the Co-ordinator who had to step up until a new manager could be recruited.

IAS Service Camden has always explored opportunities to increase its publicity and it is felt that the recent commissioning to Camden Learning will help with this. Future plans to co-work on projects will extend the reach of the service to disadvantaged or hard to reach groups, identified through Camden Learning data.

Initial impact of IAS programme funding

With the end of the service review, commissioning of the service, recruitment of a permanent IAS Service Manager and IAS Officer, the service is now going through a re-birth. Uncertainties around the future of

the service have been resolved resulting in IAS Service now being able to work strategically which had not possible before.

Although the manager was not lacking ideas for the development of the service there wasn't any capacity to devote the required time for planning and embedding new initiatives. The additional funding enabled the recruitment of additional staff, to free up manager time for strategic planning and implementation.

Impact to service beneficiaries

Attendance at Resilient Families training offered by the LA resulted in service contact forms being reviewed. It became apparent that the service was not outcome focused enough, hence the change in the format of the forms and information requested, when first contacted by a service user. The service has now has measurable targets/outcomes for each case.

The relationship with Camden Learning will not only result in additional publicity for the service; it joins Camden Schools and Camden families closer together as each are able to understand the other better, through increased contacts and sharing of information.

By having the opportunity to comprehensively self-evaluate the service, review and plan the future areas of work through an evidence-based framework, there is increased confidence that areas of work requiring attention and development are now being targeted.

The service will be moving office shortly to a more central location which will help increase outreach work. The new office will be based in Kentish Town Community Centre who also have strong strategic plans for youth work and want to work with the IAS Service to develop and embed a service for YP that mirrors that offered to parent/carers. The local MP holds his advice surgeries at the new location so this will also help to raise the profile of SENDIASS as introductions take place after the move.

An invitation was recently received for the Service Manager to facilitate a discussion group in a local Women's Centre, around education, exclusions and experiences of Somali families with CYP with SEND. The information garnered at this discussion will help plan workshops for Somali parents to inform them of educational issues and processes and to encourage involvement and empowerment in this community.

The IAS Service has been invited to present at the Great Ormond Street Hospital Neurodisability Team training, around supporting parental requests for EHC Needs Assessments, and hope that this will also be a pathway for SENDIASS attendance at Paediatric clinics etc within Camden.

Lessons learnt

It is important to acknowledge that recruitment will usually take longer than expected. Going forward the service will make sure this is factored in.

The manager has learnt a great deal about planning and is currently researching different project management and planning tools to ensure what works best for the service can be used.

The funding has enabled reflective time to really look at what the service does and envisage what else it will be able to do.

How is the approach being sustained?

The commissioning of the IAS Service to Camden Learning has enabled the service strategic planning to be fully supported by, not only Camden Learning and schools but by the LA also. The service review has perversely helped to highlight the service within the LA, and to local councillors who were contacted by concerned parent/carers whilst the review was taking place.

The IAS Service Manager now attends strategic planning meetings with the LA. Termly, joint meetings with the Head of SEN & Inclusive Intervention Service and the rep for the Special Parent's Forum as well as termly meetings with the Director of Early Intervention and Prevention, to update them on the work of the service and to identify any reoccurring issues within the borough, have also been introduced.

With more time for the manager to plan strategic work, there will be further opportunities for co-working projects within local schools, alongside the Special Parent's Forum and other local organisations. Camden Special Parent's Forum has a well-established relationship with SENDIASS and discussions are underway for future projects and co-working opportunities such as joint presentations to SENCoS in the joint Primary and Secondary SENCo Forum.

It is exciting for the service to be moving forward at last after a sense of being static and "on hold" for the previous 2 years. There is new found confidence that IAS Service Camden can respond to local need and continue to pride itself on delivering a comprehensive service which empowers families to make changes for the better and improve outcomes for CYP. It really does feel as if IAS Service is in a stage of re-birth and, with additional resources and support from within the LA, local organisations, schools and colleges, the future feels brighter than ever before.

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